

To promote tenants' progress, The GTBHC Housing First program focuses on self-empowered choice, where tenants are helped to discover what they want for themselves — not what the housing counselor or the program wants for them. Counselors start by encouraging tenants to choose goals to improve their quality of life, and then support them in taking their next steps toward realizing these goals.

In GTBHC's implementation of the model, Housing First provides a route into recovery for chronically homeless persons with a wide range of health-related problems. GTBHC takes an educational approach based on skill-building and learning from one's mistakes. Serious mistakes by tenants are not a cause for termination from the program, but an opportunity for learning and for helping tenants take a stronger next step toward recovery.

Mercer's Experience with Housing First

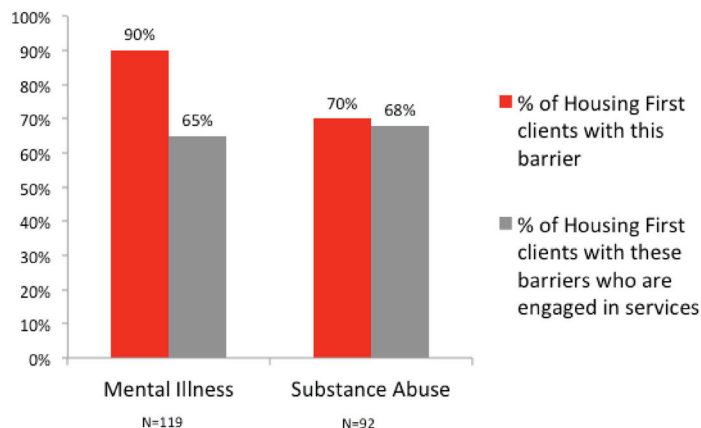
Housing First in Mercer County was set into motion by the Mercer Alliance in 2006, which brought together a collaborative of eight funders for the program, who then oversaw the program in its three-year pilot phase, 2008-10. GTBHC was chosen to provide services to 40 individuals and 10 families. During the pilot period, GTBHC grew the program by 168% to 84 households, without receiving any new service dollars.

Since the end of the pilot, GTBHC has further grown the program to 132, by finding new vouchers and continuing contracts with three funders: the County of Mercer, the New Jersey Department of Human Services and the United Way of Greater Mercer County. Additionally, housing vouchers come through the Trenton/Mercer COC, the New Jersey Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs.

The vast majority (80%) of GTBHC's Housing First tenants have been very motivated to engage with housing counselors around creating a home. Below we present numbers for those engaged in treatment.

GTBHC's Housing First tenants have spent an average of three years being homeless, living in shelters or on the street. Of these tenants, 56% spent more than 5 years homeless, and several were homeless for 15-20 years. This has resulted in very serious post-traumatic stress that affects 96% of these Housing First tenants, according to GTBHC's records.

Housing First Program Participants Engaged in Treatment



²Danielle Groton, "Are Housing First Programs Effective: A Research Note", http://www.wmich.edu/hhs/newsletters_journals/jssw_institutional/institutional_subscribers/40.1.Groton.pdf.